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LIMITED EDITION COVER
BY KATHARINA GROSSE

KATHARINA GROSSE
SURROUNDED BY WORKS IN
PROGRESS AT HER BERLIN
MITTE STUDIO. DESIGNED BY
LOCAL FIRM AUGUSTIN UND
FRANK ARCHITEKTEN, ITS
WHITE WALLS ARE PROTECTED
BY SHEETS OF PLASTIC THAT
BEAR THE TECHNICOLOUR
TRACES OF PREVIOUS WORKS

As a child, Katharina Grosse had a recurring dream that involved a dark, machine-like form that could eat anything and everything. While falling asleep, she could will herself to have that dream, and she would. 'I was in-between loving it and being afraid of it,' the German artist remembers. 'It was a feeling of loving to be shocked.' Although she didn't realise it at the time, the lucidity of this dream conflated the real world with her imagination – something she now continues to explore within her practice nearly five decades later.

'I always thought there was a close relationship between the [conscious and subconscious] visions I had,' she says. 'That's why I find painting so interesting: of everything I know, it's the closest to imagination.' At her three-storey studio in Berlin, she speaks animatedly, drawing quick connections between her childhood behaviours and current thought processes. 'Thinking about going swimming while peeling a potato shows a great correlation between visualisation and realisation. They're very much on the same level.'

Grosse, who was born in Freiburg im Breisgau and has lived in Berlin for 18 years, has been preparing for an exhibition at Shanghai's Chi K11 Art Museum. Titled 'Mumbling Mud', it will comprise five large-scale, site-specific installations across 1,500 sq m. The takeover of such a huge space is typical of her shows, for which she almost always creates paintings in situ. Using a spray gun rather than a paintbrush allows her to create abstract works across varied surfaces. She covers mounds of soil, rock, concrete and grass, as well as heaps of draped and knotted fabric, canvases and carved Styrofoam, with impromptu colour fields; the finished works are often immersive, incorporating the built environment and even natural elements. Whether in solo shows at Sydney's Carriageworks and the Gagosian in New York and London, or »



Colour blast

Artist Katharina Grosse on turning her spray gun on everything from soil to Styrofoam and, next up, five rooms of a Shanghai museum

PHOTOGRAPHY: ROMAN GOEBEL WRITER: EMILY MCDERMOTT





through vast paintings created on the beach in Fort Tilden, New York, and the coast of Aarhus, Denmark, Grosse's work has resonated. Its relationship to the audience hinges on the absence of narrative structure. Rather, Grosse gives visual form to her perception of the world and leaves the resulting works open to interpretation. 'I don't see a bowl on a table in an isolated way; I always see a mesh, a cluster. I see a condition rather than objects,' she explains. Her paintings draw attention not only to the object at hand but also to the given surroundings.

It was after seeing Grosse's landscape of multicoloured rubble and fabric for the 2015 Venice Biennale that Adrian Cheng, founder of the Chi Kii Art Museum and the broader Kii Art Foundation, had the idea of bringing her work to China – 'to offer direct experience of her distinctive style, and a glimpse into the diverse forms of contemporary art', he explains.

In Shanghai, Grosse has enlisted a Chinese collaborator, a designer for a local department store, to create the fifth and final zone of 'Mumbling Mud', titled *Showroom*. The co-creative has furnished the space like the living room of a well-to-do household in modern China: a large canvas stretches across one wall, a crowded bookshelf across another; designer sofas, chairs and tables form a seating arrangement. Looking at a scale model, Grosse explains she will enter this staged room and cover it in colour so that visitors are able to see it anew. It will no longer be a pristine,

aspirational space, but rather an imagined room, prompting visitors to rethink art's place in daily life.

In contrast, *Underground*, the first zone visitors arrive at, will comprise discarded building materials such as cardboard and crumbling concrete, as well as clay-saturated soil brought in from the outskirts of Shanghai, to create a scene that is at once post-apocalyptic and primordial. Grosse will then cover the space with swathes of colourful paint, establishing a sense of coherence within the chaos. 'Painting is one of the most independent media we have in relation to where it appears, and therefore, it can help us think about alternatives,' she says. 'It can formulate the idea that there is an alternative to what is now.'

Grosse first realised the power of painting while studying at the Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in the 1980s, but it wasn't until 1991 that she realised the power of a spray gun. While living in Marseille for six months, she was surrounded by a community of artists who played a game that involved making 'cartoon-esque work' with an airbrush. Eventually it was her turn, so she put on a protective mask and took the miniature spray gun in hand. 'I didn't like it at all,' she says, 'but I realised how the paint sits on the surface, which is very different from working with a paintbrush. That stuck with me.' Seven years later, she had the opportunity to exhibit at the Kunsthalle Bern in Switzerland and incorporated spray-painting into her practice for the first time, covering the corner of a room with shades of green. >>



TOP, A MODEL OF GROSSE'S NEW SHOW AT SHANGHAI'S CHI KII ART MUSEUM

ABOVE, GROSSE DESIGNED THIS ISSUE'S LIMITED-EDITION COVER, AVAILABLE TO SUBSCRIBERS, SEE WALLPAPER.COM

SHE ALSO BRINGS COLOUR TO OUR ARTIST'S RECIPE THIS ISSUE – SEE HER SQUID INK PASTA, PAGE 186



LEFT, GROSSE AT WORK IN HER STUDIO. THE ARTIST USUALLY WORKS ON SEVERAL PAINTINGS AT THE SAME TIME, OFTEN USING STENCILS MADE OF FOIL, FOAM OR CARDBOARD

BELOW, AN ASSORTMENT OF GROSSE'S INDUSTRIAL-STRENGTH ACRYLIC SPRAY PAINTS. SHE CAN TAKE MONTHS TO ADD LAYER AFTER LAYER OF SOLID HUES TO HER ARTWORKS

'I need to insert paintings into an existing situation – to create a paradox'

Fast-forward two decades and not only are all of Grosse's exhibitions created with sprayed paint, but it also covers the interior of her studio: white walls are protected by transparent plastic sheets bearing bands of colour and stencilled outlines of paintings past; the concrete floor is a rainbow of pigments. From the outside, however, the geometric building, designed by local firm Augustin und Frank Architekten, appears pristine: a board-formed concrete cube with large floor-to-ceiling windows on the ground floor. The contrast between interior and exterior reflects Grosse's working process. Although she begins with a structured plan, involving scale models of spaces and sewing patterns for the draped fabric installations, there's no way to predict how the finished work will look.

'The immediacy of painting, for me, is one of the most amazing things. I have a lot of analytical thoughts while I work, and I constantly reassess my paradigms,' Grosse says. 'I find new aspects of the work on site and then change my original intentions. Generally, if a problem occurs, it's for the better; it's information.'

This will also be true at K11: each zone's design may be clearly laid out in a model covered with placeholder colours, but the actual colour schemes and finished effect will be determined on site, according to Grosse's emotional and critical understanding of the specific space at a specific time. 'I need to insert paintings into an existing situation – to overlap them, to create a paradox. We are able to live with paradoxes. We don't streamline everything in one direction,' she says. 'I want to show that it's great to have differences, even clashing differences, yet still be able to live together.' ★
'Katharina Grosse: Mumbling Mud' is at the Chi K11 Art Museum, Shanghai, 10 November 2018–24 February 2019, k11artfoundation.org; katharinagrosse.com



Hair & make-up: Linda Frohriep at Nina Klein